



# Return Migration to Austria-Hungary from the United States in Homeland Economic and Ethnic Politics and International Diplomacy

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While Austro-Hungarian officials initially opposed emigration and considered it disloyal to leave the homeland, the massive growth of transatlantic labor migration, its economic benefits, and its potentially temporary duration prompted a change in governmental attitudes and policy at the turn of the twentieth century. Even as it continued to discourage and police the exit of emigrants, the Hungarian government, in particular, also became an active promoter of return migration. Using files from the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office, the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture, and the joint Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry, this article examines the Hungarian government's attempts to encourage return migration to further its economic and nationalist goals. These initiatives emphasized the homecoming of desirable "patriotic" subjects, of Hungarian-speakers, and of farmers and skilled industrial workers to address the state's perceived labor needs. Officials debated the risks of welcoming back migrants with undesirable social and political orientations and speakers of minority languages, as well as the risks of potential conflicts with the United States government.

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Austria-Hungary, a continental European empire, was a state functioning in increasingly transatlantic networks by the turn of the twentieth century. Migration to the United States, the most common destination for imperial subjects, was often a temporary affair for many Central and Eastern European migrants.<sup>1</sup> Austro-Hungarian officials scrambled to determine what mass migration meant for the stability and security of their empire and how to manage the millions of individuals

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1 Scholarship on Hungarian migration to the United States was long dominated by Julianna Puskás, most notably her *Kivándorló Magyarok az Egyesült Államokban* (published in abridged form in English as *From Hungary to the United States*), *Overseas Migration from East-Central and South-Eastern Europe*, and *Ties That Bind, Ties That Divide*. Recently, the field has been revived with the publication of new studies, including Phelps, *U.S.–Habsburg Relations*, Zahra, *The Great Departure*, and Steidl, Fischer-Nebmaier, and Oberly, *From a Multiethnic Empire*. McCook, *Borders of Integration*, and Brunnbauer, *Globalizing Southeastern Europe* focus on geographically adjacent areas and include parts of the former empire. On return migration specifically, see Wyman, *Round-Trip to America*.

crossing the Atlantic Ocean in both directions. Estimates suggest that in the early decades of mass transatlantic migration, before 1909, 17 to 27 percent of the Monarchy's migrants returned to the Monarchy.<sup>2</sup> U.S. Labor Department counts of migrants who returned between 1908 and 1923, broken down by "race or nationality," recorded that 66 percent of Hungarian migrants, 57 percent of Slovak, 19 percent of Czech, and 17 percent of Rusin returned,<sup>3</sup> putting the most recent scholarly estimate at 40 percent return migration.<sup>4</sup> While Austro-Hungarian officials initially opposed emigration and considered it disloyal to leave the homeland, their attitudes changed in the late 1890s and the 1900s.<sup>5</sup> The 3.7 million recorded instances of migration from Austria-Hungary to the United States between 1861 and 1913<sup>6</sup> caused tremendous domestic challenges, but the economic benefits of emigration for the sending country, officials' inability to stop emigration, and its potentially temporary duration brought about this change. Governmental concern about emigration was widespread at the state and local levels in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office and Hungarian Ministry of Agricultural warrant particular examination as the most active agents in attempts to draw migrants home. Even as Hungarian governmental officials continued to discourage and police the exit of emigrants, they began actively to promote return migration, particularly, I argue, of desirable "patriotic" subjects. This essay will examine the Hungarian government's efforts to promote return migration through governmental programs in the decade and a half before World War I and analyze how return migration initiatives intersected with broader governmental concerns about Hungary's property distribution and economic development, homeland nationality politics, and diplomatic relations with the United States.

As Hungarian officials reconciled themselves to the thought of emigrants who might return, they began to try to mitigate emigration's economic consequences and influence nationality politics by encouraging particular categories of migrants to return. The rationale behind the Prime Minister's Office's "American Action" initiative to maintain loyalty among migrants to the U.S. was "to keep alive among emigrants national feeling and, on that path, the intention to return."<sup>7</sup>

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2 Quoted in Wyman, *Round-Trip to America*, 11.

3 U.S. Secretary of Labor, *Eleventh Annual Report... 1923*, 133.

4 Steidl, Fischer-Nebmaier, and Oberly, *From a Multiethnic Empire*, 66–74.

5 For a fuller discussion, see Zahra, *The Great Departure*, 11–17 and Chap. 1.

6 Puskás, *Ties that Bind*, 21.

7 Letter from Wekerle to Darányi, July 6, 1907, Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna, Politisches Archiv (HHStA, PA), XXXIII, 100, 3269. For an earlier scholarly discussion of the American Action, see Benkhart, "The Hungarian Government, the American Magyar Churches, and Immigrant Ties to the Homeland."

Furthermore, Hungarian governmental tactics to encourage return migration emphasized maintaining migrants' loyalty to their home country, a path that appeared to justify, at least to them, governmental surveillance and intervention abroad, particularly surveillance of Slavic national activity in the United States. "Patriotism" became the primary criterion in assessing which migrants were most desirable to attempt to lure back.

Several Austro-Hungarian governmental divisions entertained a number of plans in the two decades before World War I to bring migrants home, many of which fell under the auspices of Hungary's established "American Action" program. "Unlike its Austrian counterpart," diplomat and scholar Rudolf Agstner wrote, "the Hungarian government actually bore the cost of repatriating its co-nationals." One Hungarian official justified the expense by arguing that it was necessary to "prevent the depopulation of the Holy Crown of St. Stephen."<sup>8</sup> The easiest proposal was simply to subsidize return journeys for migrants. Several small cohorts of travelers made use of these direct subsidies, most notably "families left destitute by the incapacitation or death of their principal breadwinner" in industrial or mining accidents.<sup>9</sup> These were only the most modest of much more extensive return migration campaigns, which attempted to address a much wider array of governmental priorities related to land ownership and the development of Hungarian industry.

Although return migrants could help mitigate some of Austria-Hungary's population decline from transatlantic emigration, they also posed threats to the imperial order. Some return migrants were inevitably at odds politically with the government. This was especially true of Slavic-language-speaking migrants who had developed a stronger sense of nationalism and opposed the Monarchy's privileging of German-language and Hungarian-language institutions, and, more broadly, migrants who had begun to espouse more democratic beliefs in their attitudes toward government. The proliferation of separatist nationalism, democratism, and socialism were all threats that the Austro-Hungarian government considered carefully in crafting return migration campaigns.

Return migrants could help or hurt the government both economically and politically: emigration could drain labor and population, but it was also a source of remittances; a return migrant might be someone who had failed in America, or someone who brought back skills and capital to invest in the homeland

8 Franz Pidoll, "Oesterreichische und Ungarische Einwanderung nach Nord-Amerika," May 3, 1911; quoted in Agstner, "From Apalachicola Wilkes-Barre," 171.

9 Agstner, "From Apalachicola Wilkes-Barre," 171.

economy. This spectrum of economic outcomes made it sometimes difficult for governmental officials to decide how to act with regard to emigration and how to spin the economic arguments for return migration. According to one ambassadorial report written in the late summer of 1908, return migrants were “handsomely equipped with money,” while other reports indicated that most of the migrants returning to Fiume (today Rijeka, Croatia) brought back far less money than they had left with and that the return of a few well-off individuals heavily inflated the average. Migrants who had been in the United States for three, four, or even twelve years were returning with just 6,000 crowns. In one batch of return migrants, 298 brought money back, while 129 did not, raising the real concern that they might require public assistance. Lean financial times in the U.S. after the Panic of 1907 prompted fears of a “panicky return migration.”<sup>10</sup>

Hungarian governmental officials were eager to circulate tales of migrants’ poor fortunes in the United States to discourage further emigration. The *Kivándorlási Ellenőr* (Emigration Monitor) and *Kivándorlási Értesítő* (Emigration Bulletin) newspapers were brimming with stories of migrants’ failures, from the penury of return migrants to unfortunate cases of migrants who suffered or even perished on the ship crossing the Atlantic. An article entitled “Things to Know” warned, “everyone is mistaken who hopes that as soon as they arrive in America, they will find work and that employers will be grasping for them.” It further cautioned that steam and electricity had already made many manual workers superfluous and that employers were responding to bad economic conditions in 1903 by “strongly reducing their business and releasing workers.” The ranks of the “desperate” and “unemployed” were expanding at a “frightening rate.”<sup>11</sup> Other issues of the *Kivándorlási Értesítő* shared statistics concerning mass unemployment in American cities.<sup>12</sup> Reports of migrants’ successes, like Ambassador László Hengelmüller von Hengervár’s 1908 report emphasizing their accumulated wealth, threatened to arouse “suspicion” about the governments’ gloomy reports on migrants’ misfortunes. In much the same way that the government subsidized migrant papers friendly to the Monarchy in the United States, so too could they subsidize papers devoted to migration news that aligned with their interests.

The politics of emigration and return migration intersected powerfully with nationality politics. Hungarian governmental efforts to encourage return

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10 Letter from Hadik to Aerenthal, August 12, 1908, HHStA, PA XXXII 100, 38931.

11 *Kivándorlási Értesítő*, November 22, 1903.

12 *Kivándorlási Ellenőr*, February 15, 1908.

migration explicitly strove to maintain the narrow majority of Hungarian-speakers in the kingdom. Fifty-four percent of the population was primarily Hungarian-speaking according to the 1910 census, though this figure was as low as forty-eight percent according to some other estimates (if Croatia was included), and this worried officials in Budapest.<sup>13</sup> In the quest to nurture Hungarian-speaking communities, the promotion of patriotism and “Hungarianness” largely overlapped and were easily intertwined (at least to a point). However, Hungary’s efforts to manage migrant patriotism and return migration were not completely limited to people whom they considered ethnically Hungarian. Some officials sometimes promoted the return of Hungary’s Slavic, German, and other migrants to the countryside, as long as they were “patriotic.” But other officials contended that simply excluding national minorities from return migration campaigns was more expedient. In the end, Hungarian governmental programs that prioritized the return migration of Hungarian speakers prevailed because they both addressed the goals of repatriation and gave the authorities a stronger position in homeland population engineering. Debates within the government show the discrepancies between theory and practice, as transnational contests for identity lost out to the easier task of attaining national goals through exclusion.

Interested parties in the United States recognized that for many immigrants migration was temporary and that a sizeable minority would return home. As in Austria-Hungary, officials, employers, and shapers of public opinion in the United States disagreed on whether to accept the status quo of cyclical migration, prevent more immigrants from arriving in the first place, or make stronger efforts to mold arrivals into new Americans. Although economic conditions in the United States and migrants’ own work and family factors played a much more decisive role than Hungarian governmental initiatives, debates about return migration and its relationship to economic, political, and diplomatic questions offer examples of the ways in which the Hungarian government attempted to adapt to the era of mass transatlantic migration.

### *Labor, Land, and Money*

Issues of loyalty and nationality mattered in discussions of return migration, but issues of livelihood, labor, and land were also crucial, and they involved a host of Austro-Hungarian governmental agencies in the return migration

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13 *A magyar szentkorona országainak 1910. évi népszámlálása.*

campaign. Austria-Hungary's joint Foreign Ministry coordinated with officials at Ellis Island and worked with local institutions in New York City to house migrants traveling in both directions. Hungary's Ministry of Religion and Public Instruction worked actively in the United States to maintain migrants' loyalty in America. The governmental monopoly awarded to the Central Ticket Office (CTO) for steamship passage sales attempted to keep the profits earned in the business of emigration in Hungary, enriching some members of the Hungarian parliament who invested in the CTO.<sup>14</sup> When it came to return migration, other governmental agencies also became part of the effort. Hungary's Ministry of Agriculture looked to return migrants as prospective buyers for the surplus land owned by aristocrats whose fortunes were declining, and the national postal service sought to get a share of the profits of migrant remittances.

Many Eastern European individuals' earning potential at home was limited by the availability of land, the paucity of local jobs outside of agriculture, and high taxes on small landholdings. These factors pushed them abroad in search of work and wages to pay the taxes on their land at home. These interrelated issues of work, land ownership, and taxes in Hungary emerged whenever governmental officials examined the choices made by individual migrants. Migrants complained to Dr. János Baross of the National Hungarian Economic Association that the taxes on their small farms, just 3 to 10 "hold" of land, were higher than the value of their estates. "Those among us who do not have land are much happier than those who do," explained migrant András Vojtoka of Csicsér (in Ung County, today Čičarovce in Slovakia) "The day laborer earns what he needs to live, unburdened by taxes or debt, but we," Vojtoka continued, "could no longer bear the expenses." Baross confirmed to his colleagues that day laborers probably had it easier than smallholders with "dwarf" estates; the "over-fragmentation and pulverization of peasant estates" was among the main causes of migration, not just in Vojtoka's home county but across the whole uplands region and, indeed, the whole country.<sup>15</sup> When the Prime Minister's Office surveyed sheriffs in counties with high rates of emigration about what could be done to curtail it,

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14 See, for example, G.Z., "Emigration Miseries...", printed in Braun, *Immigration Abuses*, 78–101. While the Hungarian government's 1903 and 1908 emigration laws failed to reroute emigration via the Hungarian port of Fiume substantially, the effort was nonetheless indicative of governmental priorities, and Braun and G.Z.'s writings openly criticized officials' personal financial motives in crafting the laws. On the failures of the emigration laws, see Brunnbauer, *Globalizing Southeastern Europe*, 151–60.

15 *A Felvidéki Kivándorlási Kongresszus tárgyalásai*, 156, 153. Baross's recommendation was hardly progressive. It constituted a modified primogeniture under which there would be a minimum size to landholdings for offspring to inherit; other siblings could continue to farm by paying rent to the inheriting sibling (157).

many responded, not surprisingly, that villagers frequently returned of their own accord once they could afford to purchase land holdings large enough both to sustain them and enable them to meet their tax burdens.<sup>16</sup>

Questions about return migration featured a complicated interplay between agricultural and industrial work. As much as government officials bemoaned the emigration of workers, many workers were leaving precisely because there were too many of them for the available positions; that very fact made it difficult to prevail on them to return. The Trade Minister reported to Prime Minister István Tisza in 1905 that vocational workers had left Hungary mainly from the steel and machine sectors because of a surplus of workers; were the government to succeed in bringing them home, as the Prime Minister sought to do, it would be impossible for them to find work in steel and machinery jobs because there was a surplus of available labor in these industries.<sup>17</sup> It was pointless for the government to target industrial workers for return migration unless it wanted to invest *first* in expanding the steel and machine industries to employ them. A subsequent note in the Prime Minister's office files referred to the reality of the Trade Minister's conclusions as "unpleasant," and his report was archived.<sup>18</sup> Seemingly intent on having a reason to entice skilled industrial workers home anyway, the government instructed the Hungarian Industrialists' National Association to survey factories and identify those in need of "trustworthy and hard-working" return migrant employees.<sup>19</sup> The political will to encourage return migration, in this case, was clearly far more important than any real economic need.

Until 1906, the government's efforts had "endeavored only to keep the desire to return migrate alive," but it had not yet implemented return initiatives.<sup>20</sup> As the government's efforts shifted from theoretical to practical, their priorities also shifted more from migrants' national sentiments to their pocketbooks. In laying

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16 Various county reports in Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL) K26, 630 cs., 16 t.

17 Letter from the Minister of Trade's Office to Tisza, February 11, 1905, IHRC 979, Reel 25. A selection of files from the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office (MNL OL K26) related to migration to the United States is available in microfilm at the University of Minnesota's Immigration History Research Center Archive (IHRC) as collection #979. This piece cites whichever version the author used. The microfilm and archival versions can be relatively easily matched up using dates and filing numbers on the documents. Reel 25 corresponds to the boxes for 1910, 14–15 t., even though it includes documents dated earlier, while Reel 13 duplicates files from the boxes for 1908.

18 Report of 3 March 1905, IHRC 979, Reel 25.

19 *Magyar Nemzet*, March 24, 1908.

20 Letter to Achrenthal, stamped July 22, 1907, HHStA, PA XXXIII, 100, 3269.

out the return migration operation to the Foreign Ministry, officials consistently emphasized concentrating return migration programs on migrants who had accumulated wealth in the United States. Hungary's return migration campaigns did feature some elements to rescue unfortunate migrants from penury abroad, but they far more actively sought to entice economically successful migrants to return home and enrich the country.

The return migration proposal of the Ministry of Agriculture from 1907/08 is particularly worthy of note as an example of the government's concrete effort to promote return migration. The central question was this: "How could we most practicably, avoiding state intervention, sell land to Hungarians in America ... and thus, through resettlement, somewhat offset emigration?"<sup>21</sup> The greatest enticement to make this "come true" rather than be an "empty desire," according to the Ministry, was to "plant opportunities for return." This meant concerted programs to provide not simply lands but *estates*.<sup>22</sup> One Ministry of Agriculture official proposed having the state unofficially buy available properties and sell them to Hungarian Americans, factoring in some of the management costs incurred by the state. The favored alternative plan, which eliminated some of the potential corruption of the government essentially engaging in land trafficking, was for the Ministry to create a compendium of parcels for sale, with information on how much was required in down payment or how much could be taken out in loans.<sup>23</sup> In the end they decided to contract out the Ministry of Agriculture's program to a non-governmental entity,<sup>24</sup> either the Magyar Gazdaszövetség (Hungarian Farmers' Association), an organization of medium-sized gentry and peasant landholders, or the Julian Society, which had done resettlement work among Hungarian-speakers to Hungary from Slavonia and Bosnia.

The Hungarian Farmers' Association did indeed take up the task of "easing the acquisition of estates" for return migrants from the United States.<sup>25</sup> Familiarity with their "patriotic activities" helped them secure the right to run the program.<sup>26</sup> The program was initially contracted for a few years, with a 30,000

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21 Report of July 17, 1906, IHRC 979, Reel 13.

22 Letter from Wekerle to Darányi, July 6, 1907, HHSStA, PA XXXIII, 100, 3269.

23 Various documents in Alapszám 2658, IHRC 979, Reel 13, and Letter to Aehrenthal, stamped July 22, 1907, HHSStA, PA XXXIII 100, 3269.

24 Letter from Wekerle to Darányi, July 6, 1907, HHSStA, PA XXXIII 100, 3269.

25 Letter to Ambrózy from Bernát, April 19, 1909, IHRC 979, Reel 25. Phelps suggested that the plan was never implemented, but Hungarian governmental records and the newspaper coverage of the program suggest that some limited work did indeed take place; see *U.S.–Habsburg Relations*, 186–89.

26 Letter to Bernát from Ambrózy, May 7, 1909, IHRC 979, Reel 25.

crown yearly allowance.<sup>27</sup> Potential return migrants would be assessed for their suitability for the Ministry of Agriculture's resettlement program according to their "financial situation" (the ability to put down a 50 percent down payment) and also their "psychological morale/mood," essentially their potential for re-assimilation and their patriotism.<sup>28</sup> The benefits of formulating a return migration program thus served nationalist, social, and economic goals. Selling estates or even somewhat parceled estates to return migrants for cash, rather than to local peasants, would be significantly less disruptive to local class hierarchies, avoiding the unpleasantness of estate-holders having to sell their lands piecemeal to locals who might have worked on the lands themselves. It also furthered Hungary's intended trajectory of increasingly mechanized agriculture.

The implementation of the government's return migration program required sending trustworthy agents to larger Hungarian settlements in the United States to find individuals open to relocating back to Hungary *and* wealthy enough to purchase land. Utmost care would have to be taken to find agents capable of practicing great discretion so that they would not spark controversy over return migration propaganda.<sup>29</sup> Governmental officials initially planned to use U.S.-resident ministers and priests already receiving stipends from the Austro-Hungarian government to preach return migration from the pulpit. Officials proposed either a commission system based on the value of the land they sold (a proposal that was later rejected), raises for ministers for each of their congregants who repatriated, or some other form of financial incentive.<sup>30</sup> But some recognized that this would not actually be in the ministers' best interests, since the size of their congregations directly affected the financial health of the church and their personal salaries. Indeed, Member of Parliament Silvestri reported from Cleveland, Ohio that summer that the ministers in the area, even those receiving a government stipend, "would not gladly recruit" candidates for return migration, since doing so would, "in the long run, undermine the very position of their parishes."<sup>31</sup>

Instead, the Hungarian Farmers' Association used its own agent in North America, a certain János Skotthy, to run the program, with very modest success.

27 Report of May 21, 1908, IHRC 979, Reel 25.

28 Report of February 29, 1908, IHRC 979, Reel 13, and Letter to Aehrenthal, stamped July 22, 1907, HHStA, PA XXXIII 100, 3269.

29 Report of July 17, 1906, IHRC 979, Reel 13.

30 Letter from Wekerle to Darányi, July 6, 1907, HHStA, PA XXXIII, 100, 3269. Letter to Wekerle, May 21, 1908, IHRC 979, Reel 25.

31 Letter from Silvestri to Hengemüller, June 16, 1908, IHRC 979, Reel 25.

The *Kivándorlási Ellenőr* reported in 1908 that 200 Hungarian migrants in the United States had applied to buy land under the Hungarian Farmers' Association's program, and that they planned to extend the program to more Hungarians in the U.S., along with Hungarians living in Romania, Bulgaria, and Bukovina.<sup>32</sup> The paper further reported that sixty-two properties/estates were for sale at the time.<sup>33</sup> Government-assisted return migration had become a reality, but one extremely limited in scope. Skotthy spent a month traveling around the United States trying to recruit migrants to buy land and return home, but with disappointing results. While many *applied* for the program, as the *Ellenőr* had reported, few were willing actually to commit to return migration. Hungarian Farmers' Association director and Member of Parliament István Bernát pessimistically reported that "few proceed[ed] past the application stage," either because the applicants did not actually desire to go home and buy land or were holding out for the state to "truly, caressingly, bait them home," essentially with better economic terms.<sup>34</sup>

The lack of immediate success with Skotthy's first round of recruitment encouraged the Ministry of Agriculture and the Hungarian Farmers' Association to ponder difficult questions about the relationship between migration, love of country, land, and security. What was the relationship between encouraging return migration and the land hunger among peasants back in Hungary? Why was it that some migrants were willing to buy farms on the other side of the world in the United States, but if and when they returned to Hungary they only wanted to live in the place where they were born? Did American farms produce better incomes and offer a more stable living than estates at home?<sup>35</sup>

The relative lack of interest in governmental return migration programs among migrants in the United States encouraged the Hungarian government to explore expanding the program to Canada. There, one official concluded that success seemed much more promising on account of Hungarians' reported inability to get used to the "inclement" weather and the much greater gender imbalance than among Hungarian-speaking migrants to the United States. Encouraging return migration from Canada had the added benefit, for the Ministry of Agriculture's program, that in Canada a far higher proportion of migrants were working in agriculture than in industry, and they were "weathered in body and soul to hard field labor." They were now skilled specifically in

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32 *Kivándorlási Ellenőr*, February 15, 1908.

33 *Ibid.*

34 István Bernát to Ambrózy, August 10, 1909, IHRC 979, Reel 25.

35 *Ibid.*

“machine-driven intensive husbandry” and they could become “master” models for the surrounding area’s population at home.<sup>36</sup> Implied, but unstated, in the report is that migrant *farmers* in Canada could more readily imagine a future as *farmers* in Hungary than industrial workers in the United States, who had much more varied goals beyond a future in agriculture.

Most migrants, in the end, based their decisions to return on family, economic, and work-related factors, not governmental enticement. Rather than being discouraged by their time in the United States, the majority of those who returned, even if they ideally would have stayed, were of “pretty good morale.” In a governmental study on the “psychological mood” of return migrants, many blamed the poor work opportunities specifically on the presidential election in the United States in 1908. They were optimistic and of the opinion that in a short time jobs would be plentiful again. Other migrants, however, were quite disappointed by their migration experiences or continuing poor fortunes; they were referred to as “Die Amerikamüden,” the “weary Americans.” The report indicated that “sloth” and “an aversion to work” had probably contributed to their lack of success in the United States and continued troubles upon arriving home, contributing to their psychological inability to “enhappy” themselves. The most important finding of the study was that return migrants would migrate again if they believed that conditions in the United States to find work improved.<sup>37</sup> Thus, even as the government worked to encourage migrants to return to their homeland, even this small survey indicated that the cycle of movement would simply begin again. Psychological factors had little salience compared to opportunities for work.

### *Bringing Home the “Patriotic” Migrant: Return Migrants and Homeland Politics*

The primary characteristic of desirable return migrants, like good citizens, in the first decade of the twentieth century was that they were *hazafias* (patriotic), i.e. a good son of the homeland. Hungarian officials sending correspondence across the Atlantic in both directions frequently signed their letters, “with patriotic affection.” Every priest or minister that the Hungarian government

36 Letter from Bánffy to Khuen-Héderváry, June 7, 1910, IHRC 979, Reel 25.

37 Letter to Khuen-Héderváry, July 1, 1909, IHRC 979, Reel 25. *Der Amerika-Müde* was the title of an 1855 novel by Austrian author Ferdinand Kürnberger. The governmental report seems to use the phrase as a cultural reference to it.

sent to shepherd flocks of the religious faithful in the United States was assessed, first and foremost, on the basis of their patriotism, their faithfulness not only to church doctrines but to the principles of the home government. It is no surprise, then, that this concept of patriotism, so ubiquitous in other realms of governmental rhetoric, would be prominent in return migration campaigns as well. Officials sought to restore the country in population and in spirit. It is no surprise, also, that migrants who did not fit governmental definitions of patriotism would be excluded to whatever degree possible from return migration campaigns.

Expectations for migrant patriotism were not completely consistent between the Austrian and Hungarian halves of the Habsburg Monarchy. Officials in Austria formulated their assessments of migrant loyalty primarily on the basis of being friendly toward the Monarchy, *Monarchiefreundlich*, as opposed to Hungary's *hazafias*. Both concepts avoided ethnic criteria as their foundation, as was befitting of a multinational state, but the Hungarian concept of patriotism suggested a more active love of and identification with the country. Austria's articulation of friendliness toward the monarchy allowed for a greater perception of ethnic difference and rested on an acceptance of the status quo in imperial power. (Though seeing eye-to-eye with the government became an aspect of crucial importance in the Hungarian definition of patriotism, too.)

Among return migrants, the most studied and most vulnerable to harassment by homeland officials were men who emigrated without having completed their compulsory military service in the Austrian or Hungarian army. The literature on return migrants imprisoned for draft evasion is extensive.<sup>38</sup> But in terms of governmental efforts to expand return migration, the government's enemies were not wayward would-be soldiers, but migrants who held nationalist views that challenged Austrian and Hungarian control in the Monarchy. Rising Slavic nationalisms in the United States, which had strained relationships with the Hungarian government, and more established contacts among Hungarian-speakers made Hungarian-speakers the overwhelmingly prioritized targets of the major return migration initiatives. On the practical side, Hungarian governmental agencies had the most ties in places that already had Hungarian-speaking Reformed and Greek Catholic institutions in the United States, many of which they supported with stipends, initially involving Roman Catholics

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38 See, for example, Kramár, *From the Danube to the Hudson*, 50–51.

only incidentally in some plans;<sup>39</sup> in 1908, officials sought to include Hungarian Roman Catholic priests in the effort as well.<sup>40</sup> Utilizing existing channels for a somewhat controversial program made the expenses more palatable.

But the targeting of Hungarian-speakers for return migration was about more than just practicality; despite initial intentions for ethnic inclusivity in return migration recruiting, the efforts quickly displayed overt elements of anti-Slavic prejudice, making plain the goal of population engineering. By advertising governmental return migration initiatives to certain segments of the Monarchy's migrants and not others, the government could recoup some of the losses of emigration in ways that protected the majorities of Hungarian-speakers or added to their numbers in communities where they constituted a minority. This was true on the national level and in more localized calculations. The Interior Ministry identified Transylvania, for example, as an important region to encourage the return migration of Hungarian-speakers, to increase their proportion compared to Romanian-speakers.<sup>41</sup>

Even in the Ministry of Agriculture's plans, in which strengthening the country's agricultural sector would supposedly be the paramount goal, concerns about Slavic nationalism were front and center. Minister of Agriculture Ignác Darányi explained to István Bernát of the Hungarian Farmers' Association that migrants from the linguistic minorities of northern Hungary should be excluded from purchasing land through the return migration programs explicitly because of their alleged pan-Slavic views. "Since the return of emigrated Slovaks is estimated at 19 percent, these people with Pan-Slavic ideas slowly infest Felvidék (Hungary's northern counties, today mostly in Slovakia) in this territory, which is already exposed from a nationality standpoint—with the return of Ruthenians with Great Russian ambitions," he explained.<sup>42</sup> "Strict adherence" to this stipulation was critically important, he noted, because

our emigrants' repatriation could easily produce the sad outcome that, with the Hungarian state's help, elements that stand in opposition to

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39 Letter from Wekerle to Darányi, July 6, 1907, HHStA, PA XXXIII, 100, 3269. Hungarian governmental programs were most easily established in Reformed churches because there was no Calvinist equivalent to the global bureaucratic oversight of the Vatican; the Reformed Church of Hungary could directly welcome congregations in the United States into their own church structure, or simply support congregations abroad without arranging for the equivalent of Vatican or diocesan permission in the United States.

40 Letter from Bánffy to Aehrenthal, February 24, 1908, HHStA, PA XXXIII, 100, 3855.

41 Report of May 27, 1905, IHRC 979, Reel 25.

42 Report #4108, MNL OL K26, 575 cs., 20 t.

the Hungarian state idea would return, and these elements would close out from land acquisition those ...who represent the most acceptable material for settlement.<sup>43</sup>

It was essential for “the protection of our moral world” to exclude Slavic-language emigrants who had been touched by “Pan-Slavic agitation” abroad.

In a letter to Prime Minister Sándor Wekerle in 1908, Darányi excluded Hungary’s Slavic-language and German-speakers alike. “Among our Slav-speaking emigrants ..., such exceptionally strong Pan-Slavic agitation is taking place that the assisted return of these people ... is not bearable from the standpoint of the Monarchy’s nationality situation or the Hungarian state’s nationality/minority domestic peace.” While German-speaking Swabians in Hungary were, from a nationality standpoint, of “good feeling,” “the emigrated Swabians in the United States naturally melted into the existing populous/large colony, where ... *alldentsch* [pan-German] operations are taking place.” Thus, German-speakers would also be excluded from this first repatriation effort.<sup>44</sup> While the Ministry of Agriculture’s return migration program had begun overwhelmingly concerned with issues of land and the liquid capital of American return migrants, by 1908, the program had taken on a powerful nationalist purpose under Darányi.

Hungarian officials were concerned not only about the return of physical individuals promoting pan-Slavism or Slavic nationalism, but also about writings by Slavic nationalists being sent home. The Hungarian government had several tools at its disposal to try to mitigate the effects of the return of undesirable people and materials. Local officials were asked to report on the reappearance of specific individuals, as well as people who received mailings of known Slavic-American publications that agitated against the Monarchy. Alongside the presses in Prague and Túrócszentmárton (today Martin in Slovakia), officials identified presses in the United States as the sources of newspapers, journals, and pamphlets distributed by the “American Pan-Slavic anti-national movement.” One policy adviser insisted to the Minister of Commerce that “preventative measures” be taken, because by the time these materials fell into readers’ hands it was too late to do anything about them. The postal service, he advised, should track the return addresses of Czech-language materials coming to Slovak-speaking areas of Hungary from America and Austria and, if possible, obtain a list of subscribers to censor them more surgically.<sup>45</sup>

43 Report of May 21, 1908, IHRC 979, Reel 25.

44 Letter from Wekerle to Darányi, July 6, 1907, HHStA, PA XXXIII, 100, 3269.

45 Report of László Szabó, March 3, 1907, IHRC 979, Reel 25.

In addition to separatist nationalism, return migrants returned home with other political ideologies that homeland officials considered undesirable or threatening, regardless of the migrants' professed nationality. Many of the changes that migrants generally underwent in the United States were shared by Hungarian-speakers and Slavic-language-speakers: changes in economic condition, heightened political consciousness and a growing desire for a more democratic Hungary, and heightened modern class consciousness from having worked in an industrial setting. Too radical a position in any of these areas was thought to make migrants less amenable to life back home and potentially a threat, and thus subject to surveillance and harassment by local authorities upon their return.<sup>46</sup> "Patriotism" thus signaled a non-threatening stance in nationality politics, i.e. a record clean of activism in anything that could be labeled pan-Slav, as well as a non-threatening stance with regards to the political and social status quo more broadly.

In Austria-Hungary, a host of political orientations was deemed threatening to the status quo, from democracy to socialism. "You could see ...that [migrants] returned with new social ideas rather tinged with socialism," one councilor reported to the prime minister in 1909. The examples he gave of this, however, were merely demanding "humane treatment" and their elation at being referred to by honorific titles like "Mr." even by authorities in the United States.<sup>47</sup> The social leveling that Austro-Hungarian officials feared from return migrants was less of an immediate threat but more of a long-term one. On the whole, before World War I, migrants did not actively seek to revolutionize Hungary's class structure and political system on their visits home, but they did support more democratically inclined candidates, like Count Mihály Károlyi, and they started to envision a more democratic future for Austria-Hungary. The consequences of return migration for separatist nationalism were apparent much more quickly, especially with the outbreak of World War I.

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46 See, for example, Kramár, *From the Danube to the Hudson*, 95–96, and Phelps, *U.S.–Habsburg Relations*, Chap. 3.

47 Letter to Kluen-Héderváry, July 1, 1909, IHRC 979, Reel 25. It is difficult to know whether homeland officials' reservations about migrants' political views had any concrete effect on return migration in the aggregate, but the available evidence on specific return migrants being harassed for their politics is nonetheless valuable.

## *Return Migration and International Politics*

Prevailing on migrants to return was a priority in Hungarian foreign affairs, but it was not without diplomatic dangers. The Ministry of Agriculture's proposals from 1905 to 1910 were extensively debated in governmental circles, taking "great care and forethought" to avoid anything that would create "conflict with the American government."<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the status of return migrants was among the greatest points of contention between the Austro-Hungarian and U.S. governments, and it constituted a significant portion of the activity of U.S. consuls based in Austria-Hungary. Interstate conversations about the mobility and citizenship of return migrants were complicated by questions of whether return migrants were back in Europe for the time being or for good. As Nicole Phelps, a scholar of U.S.–Habsburg foreign relations, has found, massive transatlantic migration prompted an international debate over the degree to which a home government's sovereignty expanded to its citizens abroad. To resolve these tricky issues, officials in both countries thus attempted to align migrants' physical location with their land of citizenship.<sup>49</sup> All in all, American and Austro-Hungarian officials had nearly identical goals with regard to migrants (to make them loyal members of their country), which thus put them in competition for return migrants throughout the course of migrants' back-and-forth travels. The fact remained that, in Hungary's attempts to lure migrants back from the United States, some degree of conflict with the American government over the proper jurisdiction of specific individuals was inevitable.

Austria-Hungary's compulsory military service was central to the controversies about the return migration and citizenship of military-aged men. Austro-Hungarian and American agreements on naturalization were laid out in an 1870 treaty, which exempted migrants who acquired American citizenship from outstanding military commitments at home, but thousands of migrants who made return visits were not yet full citizens and thus not covered by this treaty. And while migrants who had become American citizens were legally exempt from Austro-Hungarian military duty on their return to Europe, some officials nevertheless harassed them, especially at the local level. Migrants returning to Austria-Hungary with a U.S. passport or other documentary proof of citizenship were fairly easy to free if they were detained by European officials

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48 Letter to Aehrenthal, stamped July 22, 1907, HHStA, PA XXXIII, 100, 3269.

49 Phelps, *U.S.–Habsburg Relations*, 107.

for evasion of military service. Those who had only filed “first papers” for citizenship, however, were not yet full citizens and often not granted assistance from American officials. Migrants who had worked in the United States and become citizens, but who had returned to Europe for over two years and had no proof of intention to travel back, were considered permanent return migrants and could rarely receive the American consular assistance they desired. If a migrant’s return to Europe was permanent, according to two new acts of the U.S. Congress in 1906 and 1907, their American citizenship could be withdrawn.<sup>50</sup> With no international standard on dual citizenship, citizenship’s expiration, or expatriation, American and European officials were often left to negotiate cases on an individual basis. “Many naturalized citizens of Polish, Croatian, Hungarian or other origin, return to their counties of their nationality for the purpose of taking up their permanent abode therein and when the question of their military service is involved endeavor to obtain protection under the cloak of forfeited American citizenship,” U.S. consul to Vienna Ulysses Grant-Smith complained.<sup>51</sup>

American consular officials were rather dismissive of return migrants who had failed to meet the expectations of American citizenship and embroiled themselves in politics at home. American nativists and proponents of immigration restriction might well have been glad to see migrants return to Europe once injured or too old to work in the United States, and thus not become a public burden, but the preference was overwhelmingly that migrants, while they could retain cultural affection for their homeland, reassign their political allegiance to the United States. These ideas put Austro-Hungarian return migration campaigns directly at odds with Americanization efforts in the United States.

American efforts to keep Austro-Hungarian migrants in the United States ebbed and flowed with changes in industrial labor demands and with the contest between nativists and their opponents, including progressives and socialists. While American nativists applauded the return of every emigrant to their place of birth, the views of Americans sympathetic to migration was more varied. U.S. Special Immigration Inspector Marcus Braun, born in Hungary and a migrant to the U.S. himself, lambasted the Hungarian government’s interventionism in the United States in his 1906 pamphlet *Immigration Abuses: Glimpses of Hungary*,

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50 Phelps’s survey of the U.S.–Habsburg consular records concluded that military service cases were the second largest issue American consuls in Austria-Hungary dealt with. *Ibid.*, 128–36.

51 Quoted in Phelps, *U.S.–Habsburg Relations*, 138. Although Grant-Smith made the remark in 1916, when war-time stakes were high, he was describing a longstanding phenomenon present throughout the records of the American consulate in Budapest.

specifically critiquing Hungary's efforts to lure migrants home. He suggested that Hungarian officials believed the following about migrants: "Let us prevent them from remaining there for good and let us insist that their stay out there be but temporary; let us insist that they, instead of becoming Hungarian-Americans, remain American-Hungarians," Braun mocked. "And when they have earned enough to pay off the mortgages on their farms [in Austria-Hungary] and their debts to the usurers, and have saved up enough to begin life anew," he continued, "let us receive them with open arms and kill the biblical fatted calf in honor of their return."<sup>52</sup>

### *Conclusion*

While the Hungarian government's interest in migrant loyalty and patriotism remained consistent, its direct influence on return migration was limited. Count Miklós Bánffy, an ardent proponent of return migration, was so disappointed by the lack of success by 1910 that he dejectedly suggested either making a final push for the return migration campaign or abandoning it altogether, despite it having been one of his favored initiatives for several years.<sup>53</sup> Bánffy wrote the Prime Minister, Count Károly Khuen-Héderváry, that the administration had two choices: "Either to give up the action's resettlement branch once and for all and, in this vein, gradually decrease and completely end the action," or, "with a strong hand, to compensate for the previous years' shortcomings, initiate broad-ranging socio-political, population, and homeland action, into which the Americans' resettlement could be inserted." Bánffy considered the latter the "only proper road open to the government."<sup>54</sup> Chastising the prime minister for having failed to support the endeavor properly, Bánffy closed his letter "with anxious patriotic feeling," urging Khuen-Héderváry to recognize the matter's "undelayable importance" and to act "without further delinquent omission."<sup>55</sup>

The American Action program continued to promote loyalty to Hungary through World War I and even beyond into the early 1920s, hoping to bring migrants home. This effort largely failed. In the Hungarian Parliament at the outset of 1916, members of Parliament, already looking ahead to the end of the war, believed that there were "large numbers of Hungarians" who would "return

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52 Braun, *Immigration Abuses*, 77–78.

53 Letter from Bánffy to Khuen-Héderváry, August 9, 1910, IHRC 979, Reel 25.

54 Letter from Bánffy to Khuen-Héderváry, August 3, 1910, IHRC 979, Reel 25.

55 *Ibid.*

to their mother country after the war.”<sup>56</sup> Member of Parliament and economics professor at University of Budapest Béla Földes asserted that “Hungarians now in America did not feel at home there,” presumably due to discrimination against Hungarians as aggressors in the war, and that they should be “the first to be repatriated” and given opportunities to succeed upon their return.<sup>57</sup>

While many migrants who had intended their stay in the United States to be temporary were essentially trapped in America for the duration of the war, such a movement for mass return migration was wishful thinking in early 1916 and far from accurate by the end of the war almost three years later. The outbreak of war completely transformed the circumstances surrounding return migration. The extended period of time migrants spent in the United States during the war itself and the benefits of Americanization during the conflict ensured that thousands of Eastern European migrants who had intended their stay in America to be temporary would become permanent residents. Furthermore, the war itself destroyed huge swaths of territory and the Paris settlement at the end of the war dissolved the Austro-Hungarian Empire into a series of distinct nation-states, putting many migrants’ home villages outside of the states with which they identified with ethnically, discouraging many of them from returning. The introduction of restrictive immigration legislation in the United States likewise affected migrants’ decisions, as what had once been a revolving door became a gate, however porous, in the interwar era. With restrictions in place, many so-called “birds of passage” migrated back and forth far less than they had earlier in the century, fearing that the gates might close more tightly behind them. As mass emigration from Austria-Hungary to the United States declined, so, too, did mass return migration.

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